



BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM

NYS OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION
& HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
(518) 474-0479

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

UNIQUE SITE NO. _____
QUAD _____
SERIES _____
NEG. NO. _____

YOUR NAME: Cynthia Howk DATE: Dec., 1994

133 S. Fitzhugh St.
YOUR ADDRESS: Rochester, NY 14608 TELEPHONE: 546-7029

ORGANIZATION (if any): The Landmark Society of Western New York, Inc.

IDENTIFICATION

1. BUILDING NAME(S): Gatehouse, Britton Road Cemetery
2. COUNTY: Monroe TOWN/CITY: Greece VILLAGE: ---
3. STREET LOCATION: 188 Britton Road
4. OWNERSHIP: a. public ☐ b. private ☒ Rochester 19 St. Regis Dr. N.
5. PRESENT OWNER: Beth Chaim Assoc. of ADDRESS: Rochester, NY 14618
6. USE: Original: cemetery gatehouse Present: cemetery gatehouse
7. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: Yes ☒ No ☐
Interior accessible: Explain private residence/office

DESCRIPTION

8. BUILDING MATERIAL: a. clapboard ☐ b. stone ☐ c. brick ☒ d. board and batten ☐
e. cobblestone ☐ f. shingles ☐ g. stucco ☐ other: West wing =concret
Asphalt roof shingles; foundation not visible.
block
9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM: a. wood frame with interlocking joints ☐
b. wood frame with light members ☒
(if known) c. masonry load bearing walls ☐
d. metal (explain) _____
e. other West wing =concrete block
10. CONDITION: a. excellent ☒ b. good ☐ c. fair ☐ d. deteriorated ☐
11. INTEGRITY: a. original site ☒ b. moved ☐ if so,when? _____
c. list major alterations and dates (if known): _____

(see continuation sheet)

12. PHOTO:

13. MAP:

"Well, this is an architect's building. It is very interesting. You don't see these kinds of details very much: the canopy over the two doors (very nice doors & certainly custom made). The fence contributes to the look, too. Too bad that they added that concrete block wing on the west. Let's make this a 'red minus' - the 'minus' for the addition. Otherwise, this building is quite good." P.Malo

COLOR CODE



14. THREATS TO BUILDING: a. none known ☒ b. zoning ☐ c. roads ☐
d. developers ☐ e. deterioration ☐
f. other: _____
15. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY:
a. barn ☐ b. carriage house ☐ c. garage ☐
d. privy ☐ e. shed ☐ f. greenhouse ☐
g. shop ☐ h. gardens ☐ deciduous & coniferous
i. landscape features: cemetery headstones; trees.
j. other: decorative iron fence, entrance gate & posts
16. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING (check more than one if necessary):
a. open land ☒ b. woodland ☐
c. scattered buildings ☐
d. densely built-up ☒ e. commercial ☐
f. industrial ☐ g. residential ☒
h. other: abandoned Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh Railroad
right-of-way along east side of cemetery property.
17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:
(Indicate if building or structure is in an historic district)

(see continuation sheet)

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE (including interior features if known):

(See continuation sheet)

SIGNIFICANCE

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION: c. 1924

ARCHITECT: not determined

BUILDER: not determined

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

(see continuation sheet)

21. SOURCES:

(see continuation sheet)

22. THEME: Cemeteries

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11c.

One-story, shed-roofed, concrete block addition (c. 1970s-80s) on the west elevation of the gatehouse.

17. The Britton Road Cemetery gatehouse is situated on the north side of Britton Road, opposite Stonewood Park, in the northeast quadrant of the town. It is located at the southeast corner of the Britton Road Cemetery acreage, immediately adjacent to Britton Road. The cemetery's entrance driveway extends north and through the porte cochere in the center of the gatehouse. An early 20th-century decorative iron fence, posts, and gates are located to the south (in front) of the gatehouse. To the west, north, and east is the cemetery acreage and numerous above-ground, stone markers in a variety of designs. The former right-of-way of the Buffalo, Rochester, and Pittsburgh Railroad (tracks have been removed) runs along the cemetery's east property line. The surrounding neighborhood consists of early and mid 20th-century houses (Bungalow, Cape Cod, and Ranch style).

18. Two-and-one-half story, hipped-roof, frame gatehouse with brick veneer siding and asphalt shingle roof (the foundation is not visible). Fenestration is regular and consists of mostly 8/1 double-hung sash. The facade is symmetrical and features 6/1 and 8/1 double-hung sash located in single, paired, and triple combinations. The center entrance features a porte cochere, drive-through entrance (driveway into cemetery) that is flanked by identical entry doors. The doors have a solid lower panels and decorative, arched upper panel with glazing. Extending out over the center entrances is a wide wood canopy with dentil detailing, wood support brackets and three iron anchoring chains. A shed-roofed dormer tops the front of the roof; it is sided with wood shingles and has three 4/1, double-hung windows.

A one-story, shed-roofed addition of concrete block extends from the west side of the house. Its walls are without fenestration.

Of particular note is the wrought iron fence and entrance gate/posts that extends along the Britton Road frontage. The fence has straight pickets topped with an arrowhead design. Flanking the driveway entrance are three square, decorative posts with figurative relief designs. The curve-topped pedestrian gate and the two driveway gates include arrow-

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topped pickets, scroll brackets and lion-headed medallions
(at the cross bars on the lower section of the gates).

20. Built c. 1924, this gatehouse is architecturally significant in the town of Greece as an example of American Foursquare cemetery architecture. A unique example of cemetery architecture in Monroe County, the gatehouse retains a high level of integrity of design, materials, and craftsmanship. The historic setting, landscape design, and gravestones add to the integrity of this site. The gatehouse and its adjacent cemetery are historically significant for their association with Rochester's Jewish community.

The low-pitched, hipped roof, rectangular plan and symmetrical facade are all characteristics of a style called "American Foursquare." One of the few indigenous American styles, this design was influenced by the Prairie style that originated in Chicago and concentrated in early 20th-century suburbs. Vernacular examples were spread widely by pattern books and popular magazines. They are common in early 20th-century suburbs and neighborhoods throughout the country. Most were built between 1905 and 1915; the style quickly faded from fashion after World War I.

This gatehouse is a rare example of the American Foursquare style being used for a cemetery gatehouse. The gatehouse, used for cemetery needs, also includes an apartment for a caretaker, which reflects the frequent use of this style for residential buildings. The distinctive design of this building suggests that it was designed by an architect. Unfortunately, most of the cemetery records were burned by a former employee about six years ago and no information about the design/construction of the gatehouse is available (per phone interview with Myron Zeitler, 1/95).

The history of the Britton Road Cemetery closely parallels the history of the Jewish community in Rochester. Many of the early Jewish settlers came to this area in the mid-1800s. They were German Jews and generally reformed in their approach to their religion. They assimilated into the culture of the times, and when they died, they were buried, like many other Rochesterians, at Mount Hope Cemetery.

In the late 1800s, there was a large influx of Jewish

20. continued

settlers from Eastern Europe, Poland and Russia. These Jews were much more orthodox in their religious beliefs. They founded synagogues which strictly adhered to the Jewish law. The first orthodox synagogue in Rochester, Beth Israel, or the Leopold Street Shul, was founded in 1881 as a response to the needs of these people. As the size of the orthodox Jewish community grew, a faction of Jews broke away from the Leopold Street Shul and founded Beth Hakneses Hachodosh (which literally means "New Synagogue"), on Chatham Street in the city.

One of the first issues that congregation dealt with was the issue of Jewish burial. Members felt that the Jewish people of Rochester should have their own burial ground according to Jewish law. In 1881, a farm on Britton Road was purchased from the Mix family by the Nusbaum family to serve that purpose. The earlier 1872 county map showed this area as completely undeveloped. Britton Road had not yet been laid out and the land was divided into large, 300-acre tracts.

As the Jewish immigration increased in the early 1900s, more synagogues and organizations were founded. They all decided to have their own plots of land at Britton Road Cemetery and 15 different sections of the cemetery were divided up among them.

The 1902 county map shows this acreage and it is marked "cemetery." The Buffalo, Rochester and Pittsburgh Railroad tracks are shown to the east. Britton Road has been laid out, but no name is listed.

The 1924 county map shows "Britton (Ignatius) Road." The cemetery parcel is listed as "Beth Israel Hack Hachodosh Cem. and Jewish Cemetery." A wood frame building (the current gatehouse) first appears on this map.

As the years progressed, the cemetery became large and needed organization and overseeing. Beth Chaim built a house and chapel (present gatehouse) in the 1920s. Because of disagreements with Beth Hakneses Hachodosh, two synagogues broke away and bought land along Stonewood Avenue, just south of Britton Road. Each organization tried to maintain its own plot of land. To coordinate efforts, the Britton Road Association was formed in August, 1954.

The 1959 county map shows this site as one large cemetery,

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but divided into three parts. The western section of the cemetery is shown as "Cong AAA Kipel Volin" with 1.7 acres. The middle section is shown as Ahvas Achem Cem." with 3.93 acres. The eastern section is shown as "Cong. Beth Hochneses Hochadosh" with 4.30 acres. The ownership is listed as "Beth Chaim Assoc. of Rochester/ Beth Israel Hack Hachodosa Cem./ Beth Olum Cem." The gatehouse and main roadways are also indicated.

The Britton Road Association did not take an active role in the day-to-day activities of the cemetery, and by the 1960s, the cemetery had fallen into a state of neglect and disrepair; graves were overgrown and stones had fallen. Families of the buried were upset with the general appearance of the land. One of the more vocal members of the association decided to take matters into his own hands.

Manny Hoffman had been active in the Jewish community since 1917, a year after he came to this country from Poland at the age of 18. Hoffman approached the Jewish Community Federation in 1967 and asked them to take over supervision of the cemeteries. They agreed and appointed a cemetery committee consisting of five members, including Hoffman and the late Jack Parsky, president of Parsky Funeral Home. However, the 15 organizations from the cemetery did not agree with the takeover by the Federation, so Hoffman and Parsky decided to reorganize the Britton Road Association themselves. They received cooperation immediately and beautification and maintenance began.

Equipment was purchased and a garage was built. The Association monitored both Britton Road and Stonewood Avenue cemeteries.

The Britton Road and Stonewood Avenue cemeteries are fairly typical in appearance to most Jewish cemeteries. One immediately noticeable thing is the absence of mausoleums, crypts and statuary. Although two highly respected rabbis are in crypts, Jewish law frowns on ostentatious memorials for the dead. The tombstones are kept simple upright markers engraved with names and dates in both Hebrew and English. Occasionally a gravestone will have a hermetically sealed picture of the deceased on it, a custom popular in the early to mid-1900s.

Scattered throughout the cemetery are stones which resemble

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stumps of trees. These mark the graves of young people, and the tree symbolizes a life cut down before its prime.

At the northwest corner of the Stonewood Avenue section, are graves of Sephardic Jews. These Jews immigrated from Middle Eastern and Iberian countries such as Turkey, Spain and Portugal, which at one time had large Jewish populations. The graves are noticeably different in appearance, somewhat like caskets made of bricks.

The Britton Road Cemetery gatehouse is a unique building in the community. Together, the gatehouse and cemetery comprise a site that has high historical significance in Monroe County.

21. See final report for bibliography;

"Keeping Faith" by Sara Kash. Upstate magazine. October 23, 1983.



